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Statement submitted by Women's Health and Education Center, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Ending Child Marriage and Protecting Vulnerable Girls & Women

The next generation of development programs must make ending child marriage a priority in its social protection policies. Investments should consider successful programmatic strategies, while continuing to test innovative approaches and evaluation techniques. No single strategy, however, will offer antidote to child marriage. Indeed, a combination of strategies, designed to fit the local context, will likely be most successful in transforming behaviours, attitudes and social norms.

Moving forward, there also must be more investment in documenting and evaluating what works to end child marriage. A body of successful programs now exists, and these may be expanded on. However, more work is required across geographic settings and communities. It is critical that these efforts do not overlook girls who are already married. They are among the most marginalized members of society and need special attention in development programs. Families, community leaders and the broader community are also essential to helping change norms and expectations about what is possible for girls and women.

The Women's Health and Education Center (WHEC) is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC of the United Nations and works with partners, including UN DPI, the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and numerous other UN Agencies and NGOs. WHEC is utilizing the following strategies in its work to end child marriage and improve status of women:

1. Supporting and enforcing legislation to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls to 18 years;

2. Providing equal access to quality primary and secondary education for both girls and boys;

3. Mobilizing girls, boys, parents and leaders to change practices that discriminated against girls and to create social, economic, and civic opportunities for the next generation;

4. Providing girls who are already married with options for schooling, employment and development of livelihood skills, and information and services on sexual and reproductive health (including HIV prevention). WHEC also works to offer recourse from violence in the home;

5. Addressing the root causes of child marriage, including poverty, gender inequality and discrimination, low value placed on girls and women, and violence against girls and women;

6. Supporting WHO's and UNICEF's work to reduce child marriage by connecting with the grassroot organizations and local non-profits working at the grassroots levels.

Most of all, ending child marriage requires the empowerment of girls and women themselves. Empowerment will enable girls and women to safeguard and transform their own futures, and, transform their own lives and enable them to live in dignity, which they, as human beings, they are entitled to do.

A Call for Global Action: The silence on the plight of child brides must end. Child marriage is a public health concern and it violates human rights laws and seriously compromises the development and health of affected individuals. There are many concerning biological facts related to child marriages, pregnancies and childbirths.

Please visit WHEC Practice Bulletin, title Teen Pregnancy: Understanding the Social Impact, available @ http://www.womenshealthsection.com/content/obs/obs002.php3 And please listen to: UN DPI's NGO Tuesday Chat Series, entitled: "Why Do Child Marriage Still Exist in Today's World?" sponsored by the Women's Health and Education Center (WHEC) can be accessed from the link: https://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/content/dpi-ngo-chat-series-why-do-child-marriages-still-exist-todays-world-17-april-2018

Join our efforts!